

IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Claim 1. (Currently Amended) A digital signal processing apparatus comprising:

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said inquiry information being generated ~~based on~~ in association with encoded digital data that have been recorded on a storage medium ~~loaded by a customer after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process;~~

receiving means for receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

discriminating means for judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium are ~~legitimately~~ legally purchased data; and

controlling means which, when said discriminating means judges said encoded digital data to be ~~legitimately~~ legally purchased data, executes a process to offer an additional service to said customer-1

wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means by transmitting said encoded digital data from said storage medium to another

storage medium.

Claim 2. (Canceled)

Claim 3. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium ~~after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process~~ with an algorithm of a predetermined version into digital data having undergone a ~~low bit rate coding process~~ encoding with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

Claim 4. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means restoring said encoded digital data ~~having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process~~ onto said storage medium.

Claim 5. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium ~~after undergoing said~~

~~predetermined low bit rate coding process of a predetermined bit rate~~ into encoded digital data ~~having undergone a low bit rate coding process of~~ a different bit rate before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

Claim 6. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produces said digital data purchased ~~legitimately~~ legally by said customer from said information center.

Claim 7. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising inputting means for inputting identification information for identifying said encoded digital data ~~that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and~~ that are subject to said inquiry,

wherein said identification information input through said inputting means is transmitted to said information center over said communication line.

Claim 8. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said information center comprises:

receiving means for receiving said inquiry information and said identification information for identifying said encoded digital data ~~that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and~~ that are subject to said inquiry transmitted from said encoded digital signal processing apparatus;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from said inquiry from said information center ~~based on~~ in association with said identification information for identifying said encoded digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information ~~based on~~ in association with said encoded digital data retrieved by said retrieving means;

comparing means for comparing said reference inquiry information generated by said reference inquiry information received by said receiving means;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a result of the comparison by said comparing means; and

means for transmitting said inquiry result generated by said inquiry result generating means.

Claim 9. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said reference inquiry information generating means subjects part of said encoded digital data retrieved by said retrieving means to ~~low bit rate coding~~ an encoding process executed by a software encoder, the coded data part being compared with said inquiry information by said comparing means.

Claim 10. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising charging means for processing charges;

wherein, when said discriminating means judges that said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately legally purchased data, said charging means charges one of nothing and a reduced amount ~~on~~ to said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.

Claim 11. (Currently Amended) A digital signal processing method comprising the steps of:

transmitting identification information and inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said identification information identifying encoded digital data that have been recorded on a storage medium ~~loaded by a customer into a terminal device after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process~~ and that are to be transmitted from said terminal device, said inquiry information being generated ~~based on~~ in association with said

digital encoded data;

receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately legally purchased data; and

when said encoded digital data are judged to be legitimately legally purchased data, executing a process of offering an additional service to said customer<sub>1</sub>

wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by transmitting said encoded digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

Claim 12. (Canceled)

Claim 13. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium ~~after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version into~~ encoded digital data ~~having undergone a low bit rate coding process~~ encoded with an algorithm of a predetermined version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

Claim 14. (Currently Amended) The digital signal

processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises restoring said encoded digital data ~~having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process~~ onto said storage medium.

Claim 15. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium ~~after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate~~ into encoded digital data ~~having undergone a low bit rate coding process~~ of a different bit rate, before replacing unconverted encoded digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

Claim 16. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produced said digital data purchased ~~legitimately~~ legally by said customer from said information center.

Claim 17. (Currently Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, further comprising the step of inputting said identification information for

identifying said encoded digital data ~~that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and~~ that are subject to said inquiry,

wherein said identification information input in said inputting step is transmitted to said information center over said communication line.

Claims 18-26. (Canceled)